

Toronto Ornithological Club Summer Bird Count Protocol



Toronto Ornithological Club

with support from



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Introduction

The Toronto Ornithological Club's Summer Bird Count emulates the point counts of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas: stand at an appointed location for 5 minutes and record all the birds seen and heard during that interval.

The majority of birds are usually heard rather than seen, especially in forested sites, so people who do Point Counts need to know the songs of most birds in their area. If you are not experienced in doing Point Counts, or are unsure of your ability to identify birds by song, contact one of those responsible for a sector to arrange to join experienced birders on one or more point counts.

If you cannot identify a bird you hear during your Point Count, you can track it down and identify it at the end of the 5 minute count period. If you often find there is more than one bird song per station that you don't know and must chase, you should consider learning more bird songs before doing further Point Counts

Dendroica (www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/) is an excellent place to learn bird songs. However, an even better method is to go out in the field with those who know their bird songs and ask a lot of questions. Otherwise, it's a matter of studying recordings, practice, building on the birds you know, and chasing down the ones you don't. Remember that some locations which are unsuitable for point counts for much of the day may be fine in the early morning, especially on weekends, before traffic noise builds up.

If you agree to do Point Counts and later find that you cannot, be sure to let the Records Committee (records@torontobirding.ca) know right away so the Point Counts in your area can be re-assigned.

Getting the required number of Point Counts done should take about 4-6 hours if you drive between stations, somewhat longer if you bicycle. Once you have completed all of your counts, please consider helping out elsewhere. Complete ALL point count locations in a sector - avoid preferential bias towards "good" locations. Our goal is to determine how the breeding birds of Toronto use the landscape, and it is important to cover all the points, they represent a random selection of roadside locations and do not have preferential bias to any habitat type.

The point count locations you are given represent a minimum number. Feel free to add locations wherever you think there is interesting habitat, provided all points are at least 300 m apart. However, please select any additional point count locations ahead of time so you are not tempted to put in a station simply because there is an interesting bird in a particular spot. You could preselect the approximate location for your Point Count on your map, or could decide to walk a preselected distance from a landmark that you can easily recognize (e.g. 150m down path from the edge of the woodland). Also, please finish the assigned locations before you add any others.

Where to Count

All participants are given a sector and are responsible for all the Points Counts that fall within that sector. Point counts can be done in any order. A map of the point counts in every sector is available at: <http://www.torontobirding.ca/sbc/default/sectors>

If you are using a **smartphone** to navigate: use the "dynamic map" option from the URL above to navigate to each of your points.

If you are using a **GPS unit** to navigate; select the "points" section at the URL above and enter the coordinates into your device. Please note that all coordinates are listed in "decimal degrees".

If you need **paper maps** to navigate, please contact records@torontobirding.ca with your sector and home address and maps will be mailed to you.

When to do Point Counts

Season: Point Counts should be done in the peak breeding season for the bulk of species - between May 24 and June 30th in southern Ontario.

Because different species breed on different schedules, you are encouraged to spread out Point Counts throughout the peak season in each sector. However, if you don't have the luxury of doing so, it is acceptable to do all the Point Counts in a sector on one day or on two consecutive days. You can fill out up to three point count locations on one data sheet.

Time of Day: Point Counts can be done anytime from 30 minutes before sunrise and 5 hours later. In June this is about 5-10am in southern Ontario. It is not necessary that counts be done only in the very early morning – in fact some birds aren't active until an hour or two after dawn. In the peak season of early June, most species are quite active until about 5 hours after dawn.

How to do a Point Count

Preparation:

Printenough Point Count forms. These forms will help to remind you of the data that must be recorded, and you will save time in not having to write species names into a field notebook. If you do want to use a notebook instead, be certain to record date, time, point location and habitat as we cannot process your data without them. Make sure the weather is suitable for doing a Point Count before proceeding: Conditions must be conducive to detecting birds: no rain or thick fog, and wind less than 19km/hr (Beaufort scale 3 – wind constantly moves small twigs).

Most people find it helpful to plan their route in advance. Make sure you know where your points are and either have them programmed into a GPS unit or mapped out for easy finding.

Execution:

Double check that you are as close as possible to the location marked on the map. People with GPS units can ensure they are very close to the specified location. If you are doing a station you have selected yourself, you will have to record location, so either use a GPS to do this while you are on the spot, or mark the location on your map as closely as possible for later look-up of the coordinates (the following website <http://itouchmap.com/latlong.html> is very helpful for figuring out coordinates from a point on a map). Please submit coordinates using the "decimal degrees" coordinate system. On a handheld GPS, this system is often referred to as "hddd.ddddd". Give each new station a number to keep track of which station is which.

Stand at the designated point and count every individual bird seen and heard during a 5 minute period. You should turn occasionally to look in all directions, but should stand at the same spot throughout the count. The 5 minute period should be adhered to exactly (to the second). We recommend using an egg-timer or other device that can be set to beep after 5 minutes. A watch with a second hand is less satisfactory because it requires frequent checking, which distracts from your birding, and you are more likely to go over 5 minutes. While it may be tempting to add a new species to your Point Count list that was detected moments after the end of the count, please do not succumb. Point Counts are certain to miss a lot of species, and their absence is a true indicator that those species are relatively uncommon in your area.

You should record every bird you see or hear, including birds that you don't think are breeding nearby, fledged young, and birds flying over, regardless of distance. This last is so that we get a sufficient sample of birds such as raptors, which are not frequently detected by Point Counts. The only exception is for a bird seen or heard from more than one station - do not record it on both. Usually you should record it only for the station at which it was first observed. However, if it was first observed more than 100m away, and at the next station it came within 100m, record it at the second station only.

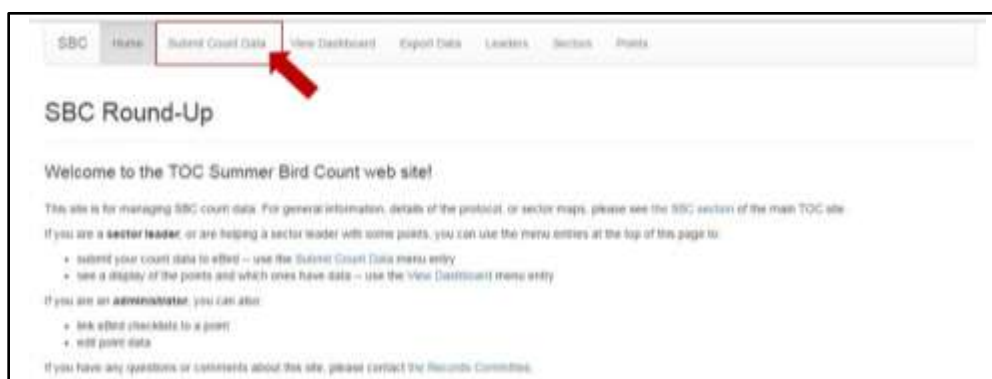
If you encounter a flock too large for counting all individuals, simply estimate the number of birds and, if you have the chance, count them more precisely after the 5 minute period is over. To quickly estimate the size of a flock, we suggest counting off groups of 5 birds for a flock of less than about 40, by 10s for a flock of less than 100, and by 25s for less than 250.

Before you leave the Point Count station, be sure you have recorded all the relevant information (location, date, start time) and, if you are doing an off-road station, that you have recorded the habitat (see details

How to Submit Your Data

Please submit your data to the TOC by July 20th. We encourage participants to submit their data online at sbc.torontobirding.ca, however completed paper data sheets may also be given to Emily Rondel in person, scanned and sent to her at erondel@birdscanada.org, or sent by mail to 2422 A Bloor St. West Toronto, ON. M6S 1P9.

An ebird account is necessary to submit data online. Begin by visiting sbc.torontobirding.ca. You will see the home page shown below. Click the "Submit Count Data" tab (outlined in red).



You will be brought to the page below, from where you can select your name from the drop down menu.



Once you have selected your name, d two more fields will appear: “Sector” and “Point”. The sector and point which you are submitting data for can be selected by clicking the “Pick a Sector” and “Pick a Point” tabs to the right of the headings, see image below.

The screenshot shows the 'Submit Observations to eBird' page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: SBC, Home, Submit Check Data, View Dashboard, Export Data, Leaders, Sectors, Points. Below the navigation bar is the title 'Submit Observations to eBird'. A paragraph explains that the SBC is powered by eBird and that count data is stored in eBird as a checklist. It then provides instructions for sector leaders and other participants, including a list of requirements: 'Accurately specify the correct location when submitting your point count data to eBird' and 'Send an email to the Records Committee, complete with all the necessary point data; all you need to provide is the eBird checklist ID or checklist URL'. Below this, it says 'To get started, select the sector leader:'. There are three dropdown menus: 'Leader' (set to 'Dan Riley'), 'Sector' (set to 'Sector #88, Central West'), and 'Point' (set to '... Pick a Point ...'). A red arrow points to the 'Point' dropdown menu.

After selecting the sector and point you wish to submit data for, two blue buttons will appear. Select the “Submit Data to eBird” button, this will open eBird in a new browser tab.

The screenshot shows the same 'Submit Observations to eBird' page. The 'Point' dropdown menu is now populated with the value 'Point #1, 40461, 74393, 394-75, 41411'. Below the dropdown menus, there are two blue buttons: 'Submit Observations to eBird' and 'Send the checklist ID to the Records Committee'. A red arrow points to the 'Submit Observations to eBird' button.

Once in eBird, enter your checklist as you normally would. The selected point location will automatically appear as a new location on the map. Once you have submitted your eBird checklist, copy the checklist ID number (outlined in red in the image below).

The screenshot shows the eBird checklist submission confirmation page. At the top, it says 'Checklist S29565186' with a red box and a red arrow pointing to the ID. Below this, there is a yellow banner that says 'Your checklist has been submitted! Please review it carefully and make any necessary changes.' The page displays the following information: 'Location: TDC SBC Point 88-1, Toronto County, Ontario, CA', 'Date and Effort: Tue May 10, 2016 9:00 AM', 'Protocol: Stationary', 'Party Size: 1', 'Duration: 5 minute(s)', 'Observer: Daniel Riley', and 'Comments: N/A'. On the right side, there are several options: 'Print', 'Download', 'Email Yourself', 'Delete', 'Share w/ Others in Your Party', and 'Send link via'. At the bottom right, there is a section titled 'Submit another for...' with the same location and date information.

Return to the “Submit Count Data” page still open in your browser and click the blue tab which says “Send the checklist ID to the Records Committee”, see image below. From here simply paste in your eBird checklist ID and click submit.

The screenshot shows the 'Submit Observations to eBird' page. The navigation bar includes 'SBC Home', 'Submit Count Data', 'View Dashboard', 'Expert Data', 'Leaders', 'Sectors', and 'Points'. The main heading is 'Submit Observations to eBird'. Below the heading is explanatory text: 'The SBC is governed by eBird. The count data for each point is stored in eBird in the form of a checklist, and the checklist ID is linked to the point. Custom software will pull the data from eBird and aggregate the results.' It then says 'If you are a sector leader or other participant, you can use this page to:' followed by two bullet points: '• Accurately input the correct location when submitting your point count data to eBird.' and '• Send an email to the Records Committee, complete with all the necessary point data; all you need to provide is the eBird checklist ID or checklist URL.' Below this is the instruction 'To get started, select the sector leader:' followed by three dropdown menus: 'Leader:' with 'Don Riley' selected, 'Sector:' with 'Sector eBB, Central West' selected, and 'Point:' with 'Point #1: 39°43.74005, 99°19.41011' selected. At the bottom are two blue buttons: 'Submit Observations to eBird' and 'Send the Checklist ID to the Records Committee'. A red arrow points to the second button.

If you have any difficulty with submitting your data or are unfamiliar with using eBird please contact Emily Rondel (erondel@bsc-eoc.org) or Christoph Ng (ng.christoph@gmail.com).

Checklist of Point Count materials

- Multiple Datasheets/field notebook
- Map of point count locations/smartphone to look up locations in the field OR a GPS unit
- Timer to determine 5 minute point count interval
- Pens/pencils
- Watch
- Less experienced birder to teach the point count protocol to!